



Co-operation Checklist

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The following checklist provides a basis for assessing the co-operation of a co-operative – the spirit and morality of co-operatives in their governance, management, communications, election, education, AGM and co-operation practices

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Co-operative Morality

A business may be registered as a co-operative but registration does not create or maintain co-operation – practice by the co-operative based on the values and principles of co-operation. This requires a spirit of co-operation based on a morality of co-operation – the character of co-operatives and co-operators in their practices and how these reflect and reinforce the values and principles of co-operation. Co-operatives are formed to enable individuals to work together to identify and meet mutual challenges. Working together does not end with the co-operative as a business. Working together must also be the practice of the board, the staff and the co-operative's relationship with members.

The essence of the co-operation character is a sense of what is right and wrong and how this influences attitudes and actions e.g. in running board and general meetings, informing and consulting members, the relationship with members and the board's governance assumptions and practices. In *The Spirit of Co-operation* (1936) Laski noted: "The essence of co-operation is a denial that the profit-making motive can ever produce a just or humane society. My inference from this is the vital one that between co-operation and capitalism there can be no peace. They are mutually exclusive conceptions of society." (p.8) Morality is central to co-operative values and principles and informs and determines co-operative practice and, therefore, is a continuing challenge for a co-operative's decision-making. It is the opposite of a moralist doctrine. What underpins co-operative morality is co-operation – individuals working together to achieve a common benefit for all members. Every word and action of a board, a manager and members reflect and reinforce morality. A coercive board, for example, reflects and reinforces a coercive competitive morality – the antithesis of co-operation. In ***The Co-operative Movement Today*** (1891) George Jacob Holyoake wrote about the significance of honesty to co-operatives and the character and conduct of co-operatives as central to a co-operative's adherence to co-operative values and principles. (pp.78-70) In ***Industrial Co-operation – The Story of a Peaceful Revolution*** (1907) Catherine Webb argued that on the ethical side co-operative seek to promote truthfulness and honesty in all the social and economic relationships of life.

A co-operative, of course, must be a viable business that generates a surplus but transcending this is the presence or absence of a morality of co-operation

Further Reading:

Briscoe, Bob Grey, Susan Hunt, Paul Linehan, Mary McBride, Hugh, Tucker, Vincent and Ward, Michael *The Co-operative Idea*, 1982, Centre for Co-operative Studies University College Cork

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Industries, Navajivan Publishing House, 1960; Village Swaraj Compiled by H.M. Vyas Navajivan Publishing House, 1962

George Jacob Holyoake Essentials of Co-operative Education, 1898, The Labour Association; Life and Letters of George Jacob Holyoake Vol 1 (pp. 37 – 112 and 177 – 198) and Vol 2 (pp. 89 – 108, 184 – 205 and 229 – 250), 1908, McCabe, Joseph (Ed.) Watts & Co; Self-Help a Hundred Years Ago 1888 Swan Sonnenschein & Co; Self-help by the People The History of the Rochdale Pioneers 1893 George Allen &Unwin Ltd; The Co-operative Movement Today 1912 Methuen & Co.; The History of Co-operation 1908 T. Fisher Unwin; (and Amos Scotton) The Jubilee History of the Derby Co-operative Producer Society Limited 1850-1900, 1900, Cooperative Printing Society Limited; The Jubilee History of the Leeds Industrial Co-operative Society Ltd From 1847 to 1897, 1897, Cooperative Printing Society Limited and The Co-operative Movement Today

Thomas Hughes and Edward Vansittart Neale A Manual for Co-operators 1881 Macmillan & Co

International Co-operative Alliance Report of the ICA Commission on Co-operative Principles (1976), XXXI ICA Congress Manchester 1995 Agenda & Reports, Review of International Co-operation, Volume 88 No 3; Book, Sven Ake Co-operative Values in a Changing World Report to the ICA Congress Tokyo October 1992 Studies and Reports Nineteenth in the series; Guidance Notes to the Co-operative Principles 2015.

Toyohiko Kagawa Brotherhood Economics, Student Christian Movement Press, 1937; Kagawa in Lincoln's Land, National Kagawa Co-ordinating Committee, 1936; Kagawa in Australia New Zealand and Hawaii Friends of Jesus, Vol VIII No 1, February 1936; The Economic Foundation of World Peace – the Christian Brotherhood Movement, Friends of Jesus Vol V No 1 August 1932; The Philosophy of the Co-operative Movement, Chicago Christian Federation, 1936 and The Christian International Friends of Jesus Vol VI No 1 June 1933

Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin Ethics – Origin and Development 1924 Prism Press; Fields, Factories and Workshops – Industry Combines with Agriculture and Brain Work with Manual Work 1912 Thomas Nelson & Sons; Mutual Aid – A Factor of Evolution, 1972 Allen Lane The Penguin Press; The Conquest of Bread 1907 G.P. Putnam's Sons; Words of a Rebel 1992 Black Rose Books

Harold Laski The Spirit of Co-operation Hodgson Pratt Memorial Lecture, 1936

Ian MacPherson Responding, Remembering, Restructuring: Presentations in Japan and Korea, March, 2008. (Victoria: New Rochdale Press, 2008) (Japanese edition published by The Siekatsu Club, Japan, 2009).; A Century of Co-operation, (Ottawa: the Canadian Co-operative Association, 2009); Ed., One Path to Co-operative Studies: A Selection of Papers and Presentation (Victoria: New Rochdale Press, 2008).; (with Erin McLaughlin-Jenkins. eds.), Integrating Diversities within a Complex Heritage: Essays in the Field of Co-operative Studies (Victoria: New Rochdale Press, 2008).; Hands around the globe : a history of the

international credit union movement and the role and development of World Council of Credit Unions, Inc. (Victoria: Horsdal & Schubart Publishers Ltd., 1999.); Co-operative principles for the 21st century (Geneva: International Co-Operative Alliance, 1996); Co-operation, conflict and consensus : B.C. Central and the credit union movement to 1994 (Vancouver: B.C. Central Credit Union, 1995.); Building and protecting the co-operative movement: a brief history of the Co-operative Union of Canada, 1909-84 (Ottawa: Co-operative Union of Canada, no date.); Co-operative movement on the prairies, 1900-1955 (Ottawa : Canadian Historical Association, 1979.); Each for all : a history of the co-operative movement in English Canada, 1900-1945 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1979.)

George William Russell Selections From the Contributions to The Irish Homestead by G.W. Russell – A.E, 1978 Vols 1 & 2 Summerfield, Henry (Ed.) Humanities Press; Co-operation and Nationality (1913) Norman, Remington & Company; *The National Being : Some Thoughts on an Irish Polity* (1916) The Macmillan Company; *The Candle of Vision* (London: Macmillan 1918); *The Living Torch* (1937)

Nils Thedin A Moral Commitment Raben & Sjogren 1988

James Peter Warbasse *Co-Operative Democracy through Voluntary Association of the People as Consumers*, Macmillan, 1927; *The Doctor and the Public*, Paul B. Hoeber, Inc, New York, 1935; *The Cooperative Way, a Method of World Reconstruction*, Barnes & Noble, 1946; Problems of co-operation – a study of the deficiencies of the cooperative method of economic organisation and the difficulties in the way of its expansion, Island Press 1942; *Cooperative Peace*, Cooperative Publishing Association, 1950; *Three Voyages: The Story of an Inquiring Soul* (autobiography), 1956

In reviewing and responding to the Co-operation Checklist, it is critical to honestly respond instead of resorting to political and unthinking answers e.g. pretending that a Chairman who shouts at and tells some directors at a meeting to shut-up is facilitating co-operation.

Catherine Webb (Ed) *Industrial Co-operation – The Story of a Peaceful Revolution*, Co-operative Union Limited, 1907

Governance

The attitudes and procedures of the co-operative board.

Is there a governance focus on putting co-operative values and principles into practice?

How often does the board meet?

Is the agenda with supporting documentation circulated to all directors before meetings?

Are directors focussed on giving to rather than taking from the co-operative and do they understand the difference?

Are all directors provided with individual copies of all documents discussed at board meetings?

Are all directors encouraged to contribute at meetings of the board?

Are directors encouraged to express any dissent and is this recorded in the minutes of the meeting?

Are the minutes of meetings reviewed at subsequent meetings and what is the process for any proposed amendments?

Are all decisions of the board recorded as resolutions?

Does the board understand that no director and office bearer can make decisions for the board unless delegated by the board in a resolution?

Is the board committed to extending or limiting member democracy and in what ways?

Does the board annually review and adopt the Annual Report at a board meeting before it is circulated to members and does the board adopt a resolution approving the Annual Report?

Does the board annually review a Strategic Plan and is this submitted to the AGM?

Are the rules regularly reviewed by the board and are any proposed changes explained to members?

How does the co-operative board ensure director capacity?

Management

The conduct of management.

Does the board understand that it appoints and is responsible for the appointment of a manager?

Does the board understand that the manager reports to the board and not individual directors unless otherwise delegated by resolution?

Does the board recognise that the manager is only required to act on resolutions adopted by the board?

Does the board understand and accept that individual directors and office bearers cannot direct the manager in-between meetings of the board unless otherwise authorised by board resolution and that the manager should report on attempts by individual directors in contradiction?

Are the terms of appointment for the manager provided to all directors and adopted by resolution?

Are any changes to the terms of appointment provided to all directors and adopted by a board resolution?

Elections

The conduct of board elections.

Are there term limits for directors?

Are elections to the board contested?

What is done to encourage members to nominate for the board?

How many members nominate for the board as a proportion of members?

How many members vote for the board as a proportion of members?

Do members assess the co-operative commitment and experience of those nominating for the board and, if so, how?

If there are independent directors are these appointed by the board without reference to members or are they approved by members?

AGM

The organisation and conduct of the AGM.

How many members attend the AGM as a proportion of members?

Is the Annual Report circulated to members before the AGM?

Is the agenda circulated to members before the AGM?

Does the Annual Report include detailed and comprehensive financial statements?

Does the Annual Report include statistics on director attendance at board and committee meetings?

Does the Annual Report include all payments and reimbursements made to individual directors?

Are members encouraged to ask questions?

How many members ask questions at the AGM and are these questions specifically answered?

Are the questions asked by members at the AGM recorded in the minute of the meeting?

Are members asked to regularly review payment and reimbursement arrangements for directors?

Does the Annual Report include the Strategic Plan and an analysis of outcomes?

Are members at the AGM surveyed for feedback on the AGM?

Does the next board meeting after the AGM review the AGM including survey feedback?

Communications

The co-operative's communication with members.

Does the co-operative have a web site?

Is the web site updated regularly and how often?

Are web site statistics analysed on a regular basis?

Are these web site statistics published on the web site?

Does the co-operative have a newsletter for members?

Is the newsletter published on a regular basis and how often?

Does the co-operative have a Facebook Page?

Is Facebook Page updated regularly and how often?

Does the co-operative have a Twitter account?

Is the Twitter account updated regularly and how often?

Education

The co-operative's involvement in co-operative education.

Does the co-operative have a co-operative education program for members?

Is there a co-operative education program for new members?

Do the co-operative education programs recognise the unique nature of co-operatives?

Do the co-operative education programs include a distinct co-operative identity?

Does the co-operative recognise the value of informal learning and experience?

Is there a Member Handbook?

Are new members provided with copies of the Rules, the most recent Annual Report, any Member Handbook and any other relevant documents?

Is there a co-operative education program for existing members?

Does the web site include articles on co-operative education?

Does the newsletter include articles on co-operative education?

Is there an induction program for new and/or returning directors?

Are the Rules of the co-operative accessible to and understood by members?

Co-operation

The relationship with other co-operatives.

How are members encouraged to continue their commitment to the co-operative?

Is there a member engagement policy and practice and, if so, what is it?

Is the co-operative a member of co-operative peak bodies?

Does the co-operative work with other co-operatives and, if so, how?

Does the co-operative make submissions to government inquiries?

Are these submissions published on the web site and in the newsletter and made available to members?

Co-operative identity, values & principles

Definition

A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

Values

Co-operatives are based on the values of **self-help**, **self-responsibility**, **democracy**, **equality**, **equity** and **solidarity**. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

Principles

The co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.

1. Voluntary and Open Membership

Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

2. Democratic Member Control

Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and co-operatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.

3. Member Economic Participation

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

4. Autonomy and Independence

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.

5. Education, Training and Information

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

6. Co-operation among Co-operatives

Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

7. Concern for Community

Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.